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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000160

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/EPS AND AF/E - MBEYZEROV

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TREASURY FOR FBOYE

PARIS FOR RKANEDA

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR MEA UN

SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: BACK TO THE BRINK -- BUT OF WHAT?

REF: ANTANANARIVO 154

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador, along with several other Chiefs of Mission, today again urged the former Mayor and the President to pursue dialogue, rather than violence, to find a resolution to the current political conflict in Madagascar.

Reeling from an attack near and -- in his view -- on his residence by GOM security forces during the night, a shaken TGV made no promises, and questioned whether he would even survive the day. For his part, the President came across as increasingly hardened and intransigent in seeking to "restore order" by force. Nevertheless, negotiations continued today between representatives of the two principals to discuss the modalities of a national consultative conference (NCC) to be launched soon, possibly on March 12. It is unclear today whether Madagascar is on the brink of a breakthrough through an expanded dialogue, or of another descent into violence. Another disquieting twist is the new and visible involvement of foreign (mostly South African, but also Israeli and Dutch) military advisers in the GOM's anti-protest efforts, which unfortunately has increased the danger of an anti-foreign backlash in the days to come. A new warden message warns Americans of renewed tensions, and an EAC has been scheduled for Tuesday. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador, along with seven other Chiefs of Mission, met with a shaken former Mayor Andry "TGV" Rajoelina this morning. This followed GOM forces' failed assault on his residence last night, which appears to have been an attempt to arrest him. Rajoelina, holed up in his well-guarded house, clearly believed that GOM forces were still in his neighborhood waiting for an opportunity to arrest or "eliminate" him. In fact, rather than continuing the rally in the city center at the Place de 13 Mai as planned, he called for all of his supporters to come to his neighborhood today, presumably to create a human shield for his protection. Unnerved by the night's events, TGV was unable (or unwilling) to articulate the movement's plans for Saturday and made no promises regarding the urging of the COMs to refrain from taking drastic action that could result in additional deaths, such as marching on the Iavalohoh Presidential Palace outside the city. The COMs further urged

TGV and his team to continue the dialogue as a way forward, and to welcome expanding it to civil society under the so-called NCC process. TGV argued that it wasn't possible to negotiate while Malagasy are being "slaughtered in the streets". His "Finance Minister" claimed that the only way to force the President to listen was to freeze his assets in Holland, Germany, and New York City (no further detail provided), or to use the AU Qmmitt, to which the President is extremely attached, as leverage. TGV then produced copies of legitimate-looking documents from the Presidency listing the names of foreign "mercenaries" now in Madagascar advising the GOM's mixed security forces, including approximately seven South Africans, four Israelis, and one Dutch. (He promised to provide copies, notably to the South African embassy.) Pictures of these apparent military advisors have appeared in the local press and TV and are generating a strongly negative public reaction. The COMs cautioned TGV against making statements that could fuel a popular backlash against foreigners.

¶3. (C) Following the meeting with TGV, the COMs continued on to what was a short meeting at Iavoloha with a visibly uncomfortable President Ravalomanana; unlike the last meeting, there was no jovial pretense of not being in the midst of a crisis. The meeting went forward without EU Ambassador Jean-Claude Boidin, whom Ravalomanana pointedly disinvited less than one hour before the meeting for having sought permission for a visit to recently-jailed ex-Minister Rajivason in a local prison; he would have made that visit with the US and UN COMs. The Dean (Vatican) opened with a short statement of our continuing interest in finding a peaceful solution through dialogue under UN and FFKM Church Council auspices. The President expressed his gratitude for the riot gear and training being "provided by SADC" and added that he had spoken by phone last night with the King of

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Swaziland (current rotating SADC President), and promised him a rapid restoration of order here. Ravalomanana also said he was open to a widened dialogue but said he would want first to approve the names of those included. Speaking next, Ambassador Marquardt acknowledged the GOM's right to restore order, but lamented that the situation in the city had deteriorated rather than improved. The Ambassador also noted the President's stated desire to regain donor confidence, confirmed that donor confidence indeed has been severely shaken, and stated that pursuing a successful dialogue process with broadened participation was the only way to get it back. The visibly angry president questioned the ambassador's objectivity and suggested a lack of concern with constitutional solutions, to which Ambassador Marquardt reminded him that every diplomatic statement made so far had stressed strongly and clearly the need for a constitutional soluQon. The meeting then ended abruptly, with no other interventions from other COMs. Afterwards the diplomats raised with Foreign Minister Ranjeva our shared objections to the unwarranted retribution against our EU colleague.

¶4. (C) Despite the intransigence of the two principals, their negotiating teams have continued to meet every day under the auspices of the FFKM Church Council. They have moved away from discussing a bilaterally-negotiated settlement agreement to talking about the modalities of a national consultative conference (NCC) potentially to be launched on Thursday, March 12. The NCC would include a broad array of political and economic stakeholders. The FFKM said publicly on Thursday that it was launching the NCC, but without much detail. Presumably the two delegations are now discussing proposed participation.

¶5. (C) Comment: The involvement of foreign advisers with the GOM's movements to stifle civil disobedience has the potential to cause a backlash against foreigners. Post is issuing a revised warden message warning American citizens to avoid unnecessary movements in the city this weekend, and we

plan to hold an EAC meeting to discuss this issue on Tuesday.

We continue to support a broad-based NCC as the only way to resolve the underlying causes of the current conflict and will continue to support the FFKM in this effort, both financially and through public statements. End comment.

MARQUARDT